

*Should be held to
With the best respects
of the Association.*

DISCOURSE,

VIII.

DELIVERED IN CHARLESTON, (S. C.)

ON THE 21ST OF NOV. 1827,

BEFORE THE

REFORMED SOCIETY OF ISRAELITES,

FOR

PROMOTING TRUE PRINCIPLES OF JUDAISM

ACCORDING TO ITS PURITY AND SPIRIT,

On their Third Anniversary.

BY ISAAC N. CARDOZO, A MEMBER.



CHARLESTON:

PRINTED BY JAMES S. BURGESS.

1827.

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DISCOURSE.



AN age like the present, remarkable for its freedom of inquiry, and search after truth, will always be distinguished for its brilliant results in morals and religion—in art and in science—and in whatever conduces to the liberty and happiness of the human family. It is such an age that more peculiarly marks the refinement of manners, the expansion and the triumphs of intellect, and the existence of a high and uncorrupted state of virtue. It is the great moral power of the principles which have their birth at such a time that revolutionizes society—which betters and elevates its condition, and introduces that system of supervision, which acting on the moral as well as the intellectual character of mankind, unfolds its energies, develops its capacities, and fits it for the highest and most improving stages of society. This rapid spread of amelioration is speedily producing such a state of things, as will leave little to be desired for the cause of human rights, or the advancement of human virtue and intelligence. The mainspring which is thus quickening into life and activity the energies of society, is that free intercourse of nations which the present period enjoys, and which by disseminating the love of learning,

stamps it with far greater power and advantages than any which has preceded it. The force of example is also effecting wonders in the improvement of governments. The spirit of reform in all existing institutions, is abroad, and its march is onward and irresistible. Future generations, therefore, will not have to regret that state of mental imbecility, or the existence of those imperfect principles of virtue, which acted in times gone by, as drawbacks on the intellectual greatness, and moral purity and happiness of mankind.

Who then when he sees this widely extended influence of intellect giving such an efficient power and direction to modern institutions, does not feel the sphere of his mental vision enlarged as he embraces within his view the glorious results which must thence ensue to adorn and benefit society. But superadded to this feeling how much cause of inward gratulation must those have who acting from the purest of motives, and in accordance with what they conceived an important duty, founded an institution which was to rest for its existence solely on the present enlightened state of public opinion; on that sound perception of right, and that refined and cultivated moral sense which mark the present as an age influenced by the spirit of a liberal and enlarged philosophy.

It will readily be perceived that I allude to the establishment of the Reformed Society of Israelites in this city. A society that was instituted mainly for effecting the observance of order and decorum in Hebrew worship: for adapting it to the feelings and propensities of the enlightened Israelite of the present day; and for endeavouring to bring about by

argument and petition, what neither necessity nor persuasion could before accomplish. The whole course of our proceeding on this subject has been for some time before the public, and must be familiar to all. Every dispassionate mind must pronounce the objects of our petition just and reasonable. We contended that the entire mass of prayers being said in the Hebrew language, *alone*, is but little, if at all understood, by the congregation, from many of them being ignorant of that language. That in consequence of this the rising generation whom it is particularly necessary to instruct in the value and importance of their religion, is growing up without feeling the influence of its moral ties, or the force and virtue of its doctrines. The beauty of its scriptural character; the practical good it would yield to its followers; the sublime truths and exalted principles, it embraces, are also lost in the obscurity of a language that has become almost obsolete, and is but little cultivated. What then is the surest remedy for all this? We proposed that a part of the prayers be pronounced in the English language, so that by being understood, a just appreciation of their sacred purpose would follow. This course we recommended because as we have already said, but a very few of those who attend the place of worship, know any thing of the Hebrew. This has arisen from want of means in some, and want of facilities in others. The same ignorance, therefore, which prevails among some classes of other persuasions, also exists among some of ours. To accommodate ourselves, then, to circumstances, whilst the causes are beyond our reach or removal, is the only mode which common sense points out. This mode is the same as that

which is adopted by all other denominations. We must, like them, instil the principles, and implant the virtues of our religion in the heart, in plain and legible terms, if we want to see respect and attachment spring up in its favor—we must make the *understanding* the basis of its prosperity, if we wish to see its power spread and increase, and a deep and unshaken feeling of veneration excited towards it. Such a course would afford some conception of its sacred character. It would open the eyes of all to its great worth and utility: a proper piety would be felt; an ardent and devotional love excited; and our faith become strengthened in the affection and fortitude of its followers.

In further recommendation of having a portion of our prayers pronounced in the language of the country in which we live, we also contended for the propriety of following the example of other persuasions in having the principles of our religion expounded to us from the pulpit in short and appropriate sermons. The experience of others has tested the benefit of such a course, and necessity strongly enjoins it; for the least knowledge of human nature will tell us that of the many who attend places of worship, some do so from fashion, and some from habit and example. Few are influenced by pure feelings of devotion, or the higher duties of morality. We therefore say if the deeper obligations of religion are to be inculcated with advantage to society, it is necessary to impress deeply on the mind its spiritual power, its gracious precepts, and all its holy and better influences on the present and future existence of mankind.

We accordingly find that ministers of other denominations are in the constant practice of expounding

the tenets of their faith to their auditors :—they reveal its holy truths ; they show the moral beauty and fitness of all its parts, and hold forth in fervent and appropriate strains its virtues, and bright and prominent characteristics. It is in this manner also that a minister becomes of essential service in effecting all the higher objects of society. He secures the spiritual happiness and furthers the temporal welfare of his flock. He reforms the vicious, directs the ignorant, and exalts the pious. He cultivates and trains the moral feelings ; and gives a safe and salutary direction to the principles of virtue. It is thus likewise that the better half of mankind are made to understand, and venerate their faith: their perception of it is made strong, and bright and enduring : they are taught its divine uses ; they feel its divine influence ; and thus give themselves up to the generous impulses of its moral energy and power.

Who, therefore, can deny the utility which must ensue from the alterations we recommend to be made in our *form* of worship ? None surely who have any remaining respect for their religion ; none who still wish to see it flourish as in its ancient day, unstript of its glory ; full of practical good and benefit to its followers, and still immeasurable in its great and happy dispensations.

Growing out of this view of the bad discipline prevailing in our Synagogue, it appears astonishing to us that our nation should have overlooked for centuries, and in an age like the present so full of enlightened and efficient regulations for the moral government of mankind, the benefits of the pulpit. As the fount of inspiration itself ; and as the holy place from whence emanates the most sacred precepts,

with a force and effect no where else witnessed, what can compete with it in modern times ? Whilst it has been a great instrument with almost every other nation for the improvement, and I may say, the ornament of society, our people have always neglected the all important purposes to which it can be devoted. In such a country as ours with institutions of such direct and liberal influence on the people, where its sacred uses cannot be abused by power, nor perverted by priestcraft, its advantages would be incalculable. Where the beneficial use of education has been defeated or neglected—where no lessons of virtue have been early instilled into the mind, how often does the pulpit infuse the sense of moral right, and awaken the feelings to the higher purposes and exalted ends of religion. Through its means man is instructed with regard to his social duties ; it instills into him all the charities of life ; and impresses him with his awful responsibilities as a moral agent. The nature of civil as well as religious institutions, and their bearing on the welfare of mankind, are often developed and defined from the pulpit. It has a bearing in short, upon every principle of action in human nature, and it requires but little observation to see its extensive good, and benign and noble uses.

In addition to what we have said on the absolute necessity of some reforms, let us look at the present state of society, and at the various alternations which mark its progress, and see if we cannot find other causes more imperative to impel us forward in the good work we have been recommending. It appears, therefore, that when we behold the strong and unsubdued desire which prevails for the introduction of modern principles and innovations in all existing in-

stitutions, that many of the attributes of our holy religion, in short, much of its worth and substance, will run the risk of undergoing the fate of all those systems, the actual benefits of which have not been demonstrated in this age of revolutions and reforms. To make this position good, we need but view the total overthrow of those governments and the change which time is rapidly bringing about in all others, that do not conform in spirit and in practice to the high standard of improvement which the intellect of the age has erected.

We therefore say that if we continue to neglect these awful signs; if we do not adapt things to the existing state of human feelings, as they are stamped and modified by modern institutions; incorporating whatever is good and wholesome into our system of worship—and make things definable to the understanding, we stand in fear, we again repeat, of seeing our religion suffer in the permanency of its sacred character, and future usefulness and renown. How much it is at present in a fair way of losing by oversight and neglect is partly confirmatory of what we here say. We do not make these remarks from superficial reflection. It is true our faith has as yet flourished among its followers with undiminished lustre; without division or derangement of any of its parts; and existing in every period without change or departure from its principles: but in this view we must take into consideration the different characters of the times in which it did then, and does now exist. It must be recollected that our religion had to struggle in past ages but with the physical power of man to crush it, and bear it to the earth: that as we have already said the moral strength of opinion, and the

revolutionary tendencies of the present age could never have been felt with any degree of force or violence at such a time ; that formerly improvement in these matters was almost stationary ; that now it is rapidly progressive, and its triumphs become a matter of every day record. No exception, therefore, can be expected hereafter in favor of any faith, whose forms and customs will have become old and exploded, and that does not harmonize in practice with the genius of the times.

When we likewise consider that the extensive spread of knowledge is tending to the almost universal establishment of uniform and equal rights, thus connecting the members of the great human family together in having a community of feelings and interests, and in possessing similar wants and desires, we cannot discern the utility of persisting in any course thus incompatible with the harmony, and destructive of the equality which would otherwise exist among every class : but which according to the present state of things creates distinctions and spreads disunion ; and tends to the perpetuation of error which throws a portion of our people far behind the advances which time is rapidly making in the improving condition of the world.

Having thus pointed out what we conceived the prominent defects in the present pursuit of Hebrew worship in this city, and made such suggestions as were thought proper and advisable, we will now indulge in such views as are not irrelevant to the subject before us.

Who when he reflects on the propitious period in which our reform has been started does not feel himself naturally impelled to contrast it with those times

in which the signal for attempt at a change in the religious establishments of the day, was also the signal for the exercise of fanatical fury, intolerance and oppression. How auspicious therefore, is the present era for liberal and rational innovation: an era when bigotry can no longer cause the debasement of human intellect, the prostration of human virtue, or the sacrifice of human life for the accomplishment of its ends. The picture which history presents of those periods when one continued course of persecution and proscription was the attendant on religious wars, is truly horrid and appalling: when the harmony of the social system was totally deranged by civil commotion and bloodshed; and the singular spectacle was witnessed of the mild and benignant spirit of religion itself, and all its better principles and holier impulses, being trampled upon and abused by those who professed to vindicate her cause, and be influenced by her heavenly aspirations: when all that was most sacred in her character was prostituted to false and fanatic notions of her divine objects; and to the temporal advancement of her infuriated followers: when nothing but a bitter and exterminating spirit prevailed, as unmitigating in its rage, as it was indiscriminate in the sacrifice of all the finer feelings and higher purposes of humanity: when the nature of the times, in short, was such that religion it would seem could not triumph but in the blood of its enemies—nor prosper without the total extinction of all of human life and power that were arrayed against it.

But thanks to the age in which we live, that is daily recording its conquests over bigotry. Mind feels the invigorating influence of those living and active principles under which its energies are freely

developed and expanded. It is a period indeed, full of promise and splendor to society, not only in the emancipation of intellect, but in the nameless moral blessings it yields:—full of present and future renown to those, who born to the rich and brilliant heritage of genius, imbibe the spirit, and love and cultivate the pursuits of philosophy as a means of individual as well as national greatness.

When we look at the various modes by which human nature is operated upon, we will find that man is always more loth to adopt changes in institutions that affect him in a religious, than in those that affect him in a civil point of view. The cause is obvious. The strongest and most incurable of human passions (religious prejudice) exists within him. It is always stubborn and immoveable in the ignorant—it is almost intractable in the enlightened. Mankind are wedded to the faith they have been accustomed to follow, not only from the force of early associations, but often with an untiring zeal and devotion. All its forms and customs are sanctified in the mind: its virtues are holy and irreproachable; its doctrines sound and irrefragable. Their spiritual happiness and temporal welfare are thought to be concerned, and the ascendancy of reason and truth over such feelings, is, consequently, gradual and almost imperceptible. It is seldom, therefore, until they see the benefit of any change or modification practically displayed, and its utility made manifest to their senses that they give it their conviction or support.

This view of the impediments which stand in the way of the final success of all reforms in religion, should serve as motives to firmness and perseverance in the course we have marked out for ourselves.—

There are no undertakings of the kind but what if they have their rewards in an approving conscience, and their honors in the applause and admiration of the liberal, also have their difficulties and dangers. The path of the Reformer, in short, is one of more labor than profit. His only pleasure is to see the prevalence of correct principles; to inculcate what is of real virtue and utility to his fellow creatures; and to disseminate and establish the triumph of truth. In his character he must embrace many strong and peculiar points. He must look on impediments only as incentives to higher daring, and greater firmness of purpose. There must be moral courage and mental power in his composition. He must closely discriminate and nicely balance the different parts of the system he attempts to change or modify. In calculating the effects of his labors, he must look deeply into the motives of human action, and consult the genius and character of the times in all his undertakings. He must not only fearlessly *profess* but fearlessly *practice* what he advocates or adopts; his actions must be identified with his words; his honor and integrity with his principles. Consistency must form the prominent and leading feature of his character, for devoid of it his opinions will be without weight, and his example without followers. His progress will always be slow, and as we have already said, beset with a thousand obstacles. The cause lies in the task he undertakes; it will always intimidate such as cannot appreciate the great results, and important moral benefits of his labors. His feelings are considered any thing but pure and disinterested; his objects any thing but praiseworthy and lofty. But guided as he must be by an inflexi-

ble standard of his own, he is to look with a calm and undeviating feeling on the opposition he encounters. He must coolly distinguish and discriminate between the causes that retard and accelerate his progress. He must be aware of the indomitable power of religious prejudice; how wedded it is to ancient forms and customs, and ancient authority and precedent. He will thus see in the opposition of some the feelings of intolerance; in others the result of fear and weakness—and find that his sole reliance for the final triumph of his cause must rest on the dissemination of knowledge, and the wholesome principles it implants in the human mind. Guided, therefore, by such views the intelligent reformer will, in his progress, always have sagacity enough to perceive how long to follow, and when to attempt to lead public opinion.

Such is a faint picture of all those who should undertake the great and responsible task of eradicating the diseases which impair the strength, destroy the harmony, and mar the beauty of any or the smallest part of the social system.

The members of this society have been accused of striking at some of the fundamental truths of their religion. We are willing to ascribe such imputations to a misunderstanding of our creed. Many have adopted false and erroneous impressions against us without inquiry or reflection. Prepossessions have been so hasty, and prejudice so implacable, that no effort of reason or of justice has been allowed to bear sway for a moment. But regardless of the hostility we meet with, we shall always look with a single eye to the prosperity of our faith; and always consider the reforms we have undertaken as the surest means

to advance and perpetuate its blessings. The grounds, however, on which these charges are founded, are that in our memorial, we have spoken of the inutility and want of adaptation to the times, of certain ceremonies that have had their origin with the Rabbis. It is true we have done so, because these Rabbinical institutions were established and put into practice at a time when the prevalence of external forms and customs, of which they are mostly composed, constituted nearly all that was thought important in religion—when it was more gross and sensual, than spiritual and refined—when the ignorance and superstition of mankind required something tangible in their mode of worship; something that would excite and address itself to the imagination through the medium of the senses. But at the present day, when the enlightened mind and expanded heart are open to a vivid conception of all the bright realities and divine attributes of religion—when man knows it comes from, and it leads to Heaven, where is the use of encumbering it with gaudy trappings, or keeping it in darkness, when it should stand revealed to the world in all its naked majesty, simplicity and truth. But the principles on which our institution is founded do not rest for their existence on the fickle will of popular favour. The age in which we live will alone correct and purify all systems which are defective. As advancing time, therefore, imparts light to the understanding, such Rabbinical interpolations as have no support in reason or truth will fall of themselves, and our society acquire power and durability. It requires no depth of understanding to know that reforms such as ours always prosper least at the place of their origin. A glance at history will confirm this, and tell us how slow

is the progress of such things at the place of their first existence. There opposition on the one side comes in contact with opposition on the other; it is seen and felt; and kept alive and active. Nothing is looked on dispassionately. The convictions of reason are unheeded in an indiscriminate and stubborn enmity. But abroad, opinion does not clash so closely with opinion. The violence and intensity of feeling are lost in that collectedness with which the mind can look at the good or evil effects of any innovation. Comparisons can be made; conclusions drawn; and truth and light have their genial and proper influence. The benefits of our institution have accordingly been partially felt already abroad. In some parts of the North, English readings have been commenced. In Liverpool moral lectures, in English, are delivered every Sabbath, with the best results to the people, in the instruction they receive; and in Germany, where many of the reforms we have pointed out have taken place, our society has excited attention and inquiry: its general character highly praised, and what it recommends pronounced deserving of adoption in every community of Israelites.

Religion, in this country especially, should be stript of all that darkens and disfigures its character. As all civil institutions are here founded on rational and equal principles, and look chiefly to the public benefit, those of a religious nature should partake of the same simplicity, and possess the same direct and positive good in their effects on society. There is no distinct church government with hereditary privileges and immunities among us; no existing order of priesthood to prevent, by undue power, the establishment or success of what may be destructive of their

interests or influence. All systems of religion, under our happy form of government, should be tempered and regulated by that liberal and refined spirit, and that enlightened public opinion, which here keep every thing in beautiful and proper order and harmony, and with a single view to the general happiness and prosperity.

Whilst touching on the subject of the purity and freedom which should pervade all our institutions, we cannot refrain from alluding to that feeling of intolerance which still in some degree exists against the principles of Judaism. What mind that is susceptible of elevated impressions; that has drank at the pure and rich streams of ancient history, and informed itself of the moral splendour which surrounded our faith, but must regard it with sentiments of respect and veneration: or who that looks at the downward course of history, but must observe that while all other systems of religion have been convulsed with the feuds and schisms of their followers, that that of the Jews has remained one and indivisible for century after century. The early adherents of Christianity, more influenced by their restless passions, than by its elevated principles, as they act on the morals of its followers, have varied and multiplied the articles of their faith, and been split into almost countless sects and denominations, and innumerable divisions and departments, since its first existence. But what has history furnished us of the course and character of Judaism since its origin? Look first at the divine wisdom and intelligence, and the fitness and harmony of the Jewish laws as they were anciently destined, by their Omnipotent Author, to operate on society. Whilst every surrounding nation were

victims to the bigoted feelings of superstition, and marked by their devotion to the grosser forms and ceremonies of idolatry, the truly pious and virtuous rallied around the Jewish institutions, serving as they did, to check the evil and barbarous effects of Paganism—and to banish from our mode of worship the many impurities, and horrid and unsanctified rites which every where prevailed around them. Is not the generous mind, therefore, irresistibly led to the hope of seeing hereafter the Jewish faith preserve its uniform and unblemished character for consistency ; of seeing it always pregnant with that sublime and salutary moral good, for which it was anciently so highly conspicuous ;—and at which time it was the only instrument that directed the mind to the infinite wisdom and excelling goodness of the Creator ; and taught that in the observance of his just and beneficent decrees was the only road to happiness in life, and immortality in death.



